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Personal problems haunt Durenberger

First of two parts.

By George Archibald
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With his personal life apparently in a shambles, Sen. David Durenberger's key role as a chief overseer of the nation's intelligence network is being questioned privately on Capitol Hill and within the intelligence community.

The Republican chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence has undergone psychological counseling after leaving his wife

of 14 years and after having had an extramarital affair with a 28-year-old former secretary, he has acknowledged in recent interviews.

About a year ago, Mr. Durenberger, 51, moved out of his \$279,000 home near the CIA's headquarters in Langley, Va., where his wife, Penny, and four sons from a previous marriage still live, according to former staff members and friends of the senator.

Mr. Durenberger's marital split followed earlier family turmoil involving frequent drug use by his two oldest sons, now 21 and 22, who underwent professional counseling to end their dependency, he told re-

porters for the Minneapolis Star-Tribune and the Knight-Ridder newspaper chain.

The senator also said in the interviews he is under counseling, but declined to elaborate.

"Yes, there is someone [a psychologist] he goes to in Boston," said Karen L. Doyme, Mr. Durenberger's press secretary. "It's primarily for marriage counseling."

Some of Mr. Durenberger's public behavior also has drawn attention recently.

He was arrested for disorderly conduct Jan. 14 at Boston's Logan Airport following a dispute with police after he jumped the cab line. Police said he argued that he was a U.S. senator who had to make "important appointments." A local magistrate later dismissed the case, ruling that the police complaint was "without grounds."

Miss Doyme would not say whether the senator had flown to Boston for a session with his psychologist.

"He was in Boston to give a speech," she said. "I don't know what other appointments he might have had."

For the past year, the Minnesota senator has lived at a Christian fellowship house in Arlington called the Cedars, described by supporters as an evangelical ministry aimed at people in leadership positions from throughout the world.

The luxuriously furnished colonial-style mansion on the bluffs above the Potomac River is operated by the Fellowship Foundation, run by Doug Coe, who for over a decade has ministered to business executives, senior U.S. government officials and diplomats from other countries.

"Doug Coe brought Chuck Colson [former Nixon adviser convicted in the Watergate case] to Christ," said an administration official.

The official said the foundation "has no political stripe" and is "Bible-centered, evangelical [and] orthodox from a theological perspective."

"I'd say Durenberger is probably feeling a lot of guilt, a lot of shame, and is probably very low on himself right now," he said. "At Cedars, the aim is to lift him up, undergird him and get him reconciled with his wife."

Mr. Durenberger, who declined to be interviewed for this article, said he intended to stay out of the public eye when he became Intelligence Committee chairman 14 months ago.

Instead, he and Vermont Sen. Patrick Leahy, the panel's Democratic vice chairman, have used their positions to be outspoken on foreign policy issues and to criticize U.S. clandestine operations overseas.

Mr. Durenberger has publicly led the fight against covert aid to anti-communist resistance forces in Nicaragua, Afghanistan and Angola. But he suggested U.S. covert action in the Philippines to destabilize the regime of Ferdinand Marcos and force his resignation, months before the former Filipino president fled his country.

Mr. Durenberger's public statements recently prompted CIA Di-

rector V of compromising national security. Now, revelations of the Minnesotan's marital and emotional difficulties have raised questions about the possible damage his problems might do to the trust relationship that exists between congressional overseers of secret intelligence operations and the 19 U.S. intelligence agencies led by the CIA.

Present and former intelligence committee members refused to comment on Mr. Durenberger's specific situation, saying they were unaware of his problems before the recent publicity.

But generally, they said, lawmakers who have emotional and psychological problems should be denied access to national secrets and barred from intelligence committees, to preserve the credibility of Congress' important oversight responsibility.

"When you get playing around with another woman, that can cause

problems [that might compromise national secrets] probably more than being on narcotics," said Sen. Barry Goldwater, Arizona Republican, who preceded Mr. Durenberger as chairman of the Senate intelligence panel.

Both Congress and the administration face a dilemma following Mr. Durenberger's public admission of his emotional difficulties, said Sen. Malcolm Wallop, Wyoming Republican, who left the Intelligence Committee in 1985 after serving eight years.

"There I think that you've really got the intelligence community in a very difficult situation, because Congress is very thin-skinned about its general reliability," said Mr. Wallop. "It [Congress] will state till hell freezes over that it is totally reliable in both houses, and yet we know of instances where it has not been."

"And this intelligence community is under one obligation to be forthcoming and another obligation

to be able to deliver its services and the capabilities to the country that it's designed to do," Mr. Wallop said. "But it strikes me that if there are those who elicit concerns to the community that they then ought to meet with the leadership [of Congress] and discuss it."

"I understand those concerns," Mrs. Durenberger said in a brief discussion at her home. "I [once] worked for the National Security Agency. I know the security concerns. We were always so very careful about people with debts or alcohol problems and so forth."

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Fighting to hold back tears, Mrs. Durenberger declined to discuss her husband's estrangement and reported efforts to reconcile their marriage.

Friends of the couple, distraught over the family's crisis, point to the immovable object in Mr. Durenberger's life — his Catholic upbringing — which in midlife they say has apparently collided with the irresistible force of his intellectual, liberal-leaning pragmatism.

For the first 21 years of his life, Mr. Durenberger was brought up in the monastic surroundings of a Benedictine abbey at St. Johns University in Collegeville, Minn., where his father was athletic director. "Catholic belief is a very important aspect of his life," said a former Minnesota journalist and close family friend.

With a political science education and a law degree, he joined the South Minneapolis law firm started by former Minnesota Gov. Harold Stassen — who helped organize and write the charter for the United Nations — and immersed himself in political activism in the moderate-liberal wing of the Republican party.

In 1962, Mr. Durenberger helped elect Gov. Elmer L. Anderson — a liberal Republican who has remained one of his closest friends and confidantes — and was part of an "anyone-but-Goldwater" effort in 1964.

In 1970, Mr. Durenberger's first wife, Carol, died after a prolonged battle against cancer — leaving him with their four small sons aged 3, 5, 6 and 7.

That same year, Penny Thuet, daughter-in-law of the Democratic leader of the Minnesota state senate,

lost her husband — a Marine captain — in the Vietnam War.

Mrs. Thuet was an aide to then-Sen. Hubert H. Humphrey, who held the seat now occupied by Mr. Durenberger.

Within a year, David Durenberger and Penny Thuet were married. "It was a marriage made in political heaven," said one GOP political activist in the state.

"Dave had the best of all worlds — someone to raise his kids, a marriage of the liberal Republican and Democratic factions in the Twin Cities, and the beginnings of a coalition that would enable him to succeed Hubert Humphrey seven years later in the United States Senate," said another longtime political insider.

Mr. Durenberger's goal was to be governor, but his path was blocked by veteran Republican Rep. Albert Quie, who, with backing of the party hierarchy, decided he wanted to be

governor himself. Because of Mr. Humphrey's death and a special election to fill the Senate seat vacated by Walter Mondale, the new vice president, Minnesotans would elect two senators in 1978. Republican officials persuaded Mr. Durenberger to run instead for the Humphrey seat.

"Privately, the party wrote him

off," said a GOP official. "They didn't anticipate one of the most bitterly fought Democratic primaries."

In that race, conservative businessman Bob Short, in an upset, defeated liberal Rep. Donald Fraser. Days after the primary, polls showed Mr. Short about 2-1 ahead of Mr. Durenberger, but liberal revulsion against Mr. Short set in, said one observer. Editorial writers and Democratic leaders throughout the state condemned Mr. Short, and the polls were reversed within weeks, he said.

"So on election day, Dave Durenberger won with 63 percent of the vote, including a substantial number of votes from liberal Democrats — explicitly because he was to the left of Bob Short."

The senator landed slots on the Finance and Governmental Affairs committees, and after winning reelection in 1982, on the Intelligence, and the Environment and Public Works committees.

Interviews with about a dozen current and ex-staff members — still devotedly loyal to Mr. Durenberger — revealed a picture of a man who is a workaholic and perfectionist who usually placed his political life ahead of his family. "He was always going 100 miles an hour," said John H. Riley, the senator's legislative director from 1979 to 1983.

Sometimes moody and aloof, Mr. Durenberger always probed his staff for every possible detail and nuance of a policy issue — sometimes holding extended staff discussions and taking days or weeks to decide what action to take or how to vote, they said.

The Washington staff was told to refer to Mr. Durenberger as "the senator." While in Minnesota it was "Dave," said several aides.

"He loves being a senator," said Wendy Democker, a former press aide. "Not just being a senator but the best senator anyone could be. He was always the first in the office at the crack of dawn. He had always read all the newspapers by the time the staff arrived."

There was continual burnout on the 45-member staff.

Between November 1978 and Sept. 30, 1985, 210 people with yearly salaries ranging from \$11,000 to \$60,437 were on the staff, according

to Senate records. Additionally, Mr. Durenberger had about a dozen key aides assigned to subcommittees he chaired and to the Intelligence Committee.

"Senate offices, as most jobs, are looked upon as springboards to higher things," said Mrs. Democker in explaining much of Mr. Durenberger's staff turnover.

"They face that problem [staff turnover] in every Senate office," said Miss Doynne. "I don't think ours has been that unusual."

Described as moderate-to-conservative on economic, foreign policy and defense issues, Mr. Durenberger's voting record on social and cultural issues is mostly moderate-to-liberal.

According to Congressional Quarterly, the Minnesota senator supported President Reagan's positions 70 percent of the time last year and voted along party lines 59 percent.

"If you want to describe his philosophy, it comes in little pieces," said Mr. Riley. "He does believe very strongly in individual initiative and that giving individuals the most control over their lives is the best way to govern. And at times, that position will lead him in seemingly different directions."

Mr. Durenberger "takes bits and pieces of everybody's ideas to build his synthesis on the issue after he has done his initial analysis," said Richard P. Teske, another former aide.

"It makes it very difficult to categorize Dave Durenberger," said Mr. Riley.

However, some political activists — both liberals and conservatives —

view Mr. Durenberger as inconsistent or insincere in his policy stands.

Back home, Mr. Durenberger has lambasted Mr. Reagan's budget proposals as deceptive and hurtful to the poor, the cities and farmers.

But in 1981 and 1982, he voted with the administration on all the tough budget and tax votes. He also voted with the Senate majority in 1982 to pass a balanced budget constitutional amendment. And last December he voted for the Gramm-Rudman balanced-budget plan.

His record is similarly mixed on defense policy. The senator, who with staff aide Stephen Ockenden wrote "Neither Madmen Nor Mes-siahs," a book on defense policy and arms control, has voted for higher defense spending. But he told the Minnesota Press Club a year ago that the Pentagon is rife with waste and that interservice rivalry causes expensive duplications such as four air forces when "we no longer need an Air Force."

Mr. Durenberger has voted against a nuclear freeze, but said in his book that he favors unilateral U.S. withdrawal of battlefield nuclear weapons from Europe. He voted against deployment of the MX missile and the sale of AWACS electronic surveillance aircraft to Saudi Arabia.

He said in his book that the president's space-based Strategic Defense Initiative "may have set the world running off in the opposite direction" from its stated objectives of world peace and security.

"It raises the Soviets' fears that we may want to use our nuclear weapons against them while shielding ourselves from attack," he wrote.

In Minnesota, he has said the United States should promote and nourish democratic revolution in Central America by overthrowing, if necessary, dictators of the left or right.

"You have to pull some public opinion in this country off the notion that there's nothing wrong with a commie as long as he provides health, education and welfare," he told the Minneapolis Star-Tribune in a February 1985 interview.

But Mr. Durenberger has flip-flopped on U.S. covert aid to Nicaraguan resistance fighters. While taking a steadfast position that he opposed covert aid to undermine the Sandinista Marxist regime, he voted to allow the CIA to dispense \$14 million in "non-lethal" supplies to the anti-Sandinista rebels in one show-down Senate vote last April.

The Intelligence Committee chairman has always supported overt aid and opposed covert aid through the CIA, said Mr. Riley.

"He consistently voted against covert aid until [last year] it was covert or nothing, at which point he voted for aid," Mr. Riley said, describing his former boss as "a staunchly anti-communist person."

Mr. Durenberger's stand on New Right social issues is a mixed bag. He has supported the conservative cause with votes against federally supported abortions and for tuition tax credits for private schooling — highly popular positions with family-oriented Minnesotans of German and Scandinavian ancestry.

But he has opposed restoring voluntary school prayer and supported continued funding of the Legal Services Corp., contrary to the New

Right agenda.

Several years ago, speaking at a Lutheran Church in South Minneapolis, Mr. Durenberger criticized a conservative group called Christian Voice for branding him as the most liberal new senator. The group's rating was based in part on votes to

implement former President Jimmy Carter's withdrawal of diplomatic recognition from the Republic of China, and to create the federal Department of Education.

"Well, I can find a message in my Bible telling me how to live my life, but I cannot find anything in there about Taiwan or whether we should have a Department of Education," he said. Mr. Durenberger warned the churchgoers not to be misled by phony prophets of "the religious right."

"We see the Bob Baumanns [a former Maryland congressman who admitted being a practicing homosexual] and other legislative morality leaders, who march to the forefront to tell us how religion and faith should be demonstrated in our lives, but you hardly see that kind of manifestation in their own private lives," he said.

Mr. Durenberger is "religiously humanistic," said Mr. Riley.

But a congressional critic, who asked not to be identified, said, "I don't think Durenberger knows what he thinks and I think he's shifting sand ... so it's just the last voice that he hears that makes the most sense to him. He's a very intellectually competent guy. It's a question of no solid value structure there on which to base decisions."

Mr. Durenberger's extramarital affair was with Mary E. Feldmann, his personal secretary in Washington from April to August 1983 and his scheduler in Minnesota until Sept. 23, 1984, according to several former members of his staff.

With the senator's help, Miss Feldmann obtained a job at the White House in the office of First Lady Nancy Reagan, the sources said. However, she lost the job after her affair with the senator became known, they said.

The affair apparently ended about eight months ago, when Miss Feldmann and Mr. Durenberger had a boisterous public encounter at Washington's National Airport, according to recent news reports.

"[Mr.] Durenberger was preparing to board a flight to Minnesota when the woman loudly accosted him," reported the St. Paul [Minn.] Pioneer Press and Dispatch on Feb. 16. "According to several accounts, she accused Durenberger of ruining her life, and the contents of her purse were scattered after she swung it or threw it at the senator."

Miss Doyme said she would not comment on "rumors and allegations" about Mr. Durenberger's liaison with Miss Feldmann. "Well, yes, it's a pretty predominant rumor," she said.

The major problem faced by Mr. Durenberger at this point in his life is alienation, said Doug Coe of the Cedars, the Christian house where the senator now lives.

"The big problem in the world is alienation — alienation of the rich and poor, East and West, black and white, racial, mothers and fathers, children and parents," he said. "All of the war machine of this country is built because of alienation."

Mr. Durenberger is living on the second floor of the fellowship house, which has a dozen sleeping rooms and common bathing and eating facilities, sources said.

"I have great hopes," said Mr. Coe. "The chances he will come out the other end are tremendous. He's really working at it. He isn't blaming other people for his problems. He's saying, 'If I could be more helpful to them, I need to take responsibility for my life.'"

Tomorrow: Mr. Durenberger's stewardship of the Senate Intelligence Committee.